

Public Information Office

The Public Information Office, located in the historic Five Chimneys House, serves as the communications center for the Town of Blacksburg. The service divisions provided by the Public Information Office include; website development, media and community relations, and community access television through WTOB Channel 2, and the most recent addition to the Public Information Office which is the Museum Coordinator function for the Blacksburg Museum.

This past year, the Public Information Office continued to respond to the needs of the community and to search for new and improved means of communicating with our citizens. Through an innovative partnership with Tele-works Incorporated, an emergency notification system called Blacksburg Alert was born. Blacksburg Alert is an emergency notification system that sends coordinated information to multiple communication devices simultaneously. Telephone data is provided to the Town by local carriers Verizon and NTC Communications and in the event of an emergency, every Blacksburg citizen with a listed landline telephone number is notified. Blacksburg Alert is also a tremendous tool for communicating with citizens on a daily basis. Citizens can now sign up to receive notices from the Town on a variety of topics and in the format they prefer, whether it be phone, fax, email or other communication device.

Insert Blacksburg alert logo and link to Blacksburg Alert

Changes

In the Public Information Office, we are all about positive and progressive change. This past year we have continued to grow our staff capabilities and to reach beyond the norm in providing communication services to the community. As a testament to this, the Public Information Office has taken on the responsibility of overseeing the creation of Blacksburg's first museum and with that new responsibility and a few others the title of the Public Information Officer was changed to Community Relations Manager.

The Museum Coordinator, under the supervision of the Community Relations Manager serves as staff to the Council appointed Museum Committee.

Community Branding

This past fiscal year the Town of Blacksburg began working with Richmond based communications consultants, the Bergman Group. The Bergman Group is recognized statewide and nationally for their work in advertising, community branding, and graphic design. Through our efforts, the Bergman Group has begun working with all Town departments to develop a professional, centralized approach to communications. We believe that auditing our communication efforts, streamlining them, and speaking with one voice is the cornerstone to better communication with our citizens, and the Bergman Group has been a tremendous asset to helping us meet those goals.

Publications and Advertising

The Public Information Office continued to produce the About Town newsletter and distributed it on the web and in print to over 17,000 addresses. Due to budget restraints the About Town was trimmed to 6 pages black and white to provide a more economical means of distributing news to the community. As a result, the web is becoming more and more of a resource for town-wide communications.

The Public Information Office also produced the 2003 Faces of Blacksburg Calendar, worked with Serendipity Communications to design a new town street map and economic development brochure, and designed a new quality of life brochure for visitors and others with an interest in Blacksburg. In coordination with the Blacksburg Partnership, the Community Relations Manager and the Assistant Town Manager are seeking creative marketing and advertising avenues to sell the Town to potential retail developers and visitors alike.

In terms of Advertising, the Town worked with the Bergman Group to produce a full color full page advertisement for the Virginia Tech Football Program with the goal of encouraging Virginia Tech football fans to patronize our many restaurants and shops and to take advantage of the many recreational opportunities available to them. The Town also placed an ad in the Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference Publication recognizing Blacksburg as an outstanding place to live, vacation, and do business. A two page spread was produced for Landmark Publications for a hotel book that was distributed to all of the major hotel rooms in the New River Valley.

Insert one or two thumbnails of ads

Additionally, the Public Information Office facilitated a number of radio advertisements for departments such as Blacksburg Transit.

Media Relations

The Community Relations Manager worked closely with local, state, and national media outlets on many high profile projects and in situations requiring issues management. In situations of crisis or issues management the Public Information Office assembled an outstanding response team made up of the Town's Executive Management Team, and applicable staff.

This past year the Public Relations Team was established, comprised of several individuals from each department who either have a role in, or interest in communications and marketing. The role of the Public Relations Team is to increase awareness, interest, and participation in Town initiatives, accomplishments and services by unifying and coordinating internal and external communication efforts. It is further the mission of the Public Relations Team to advocate professionalism and consistency in all town print and electronic communications; enhance media relationships; and build community pride through these efforts. This mission includes:

- Strategic Communication Planning
- Issues and Crisis Management
- Facilitation of Training Opportunities for Employees
- Serving as a Project Review Panel and Resource for Employees
- Establishing Checks and Balances for Communication efforts
- Advocating Cross-Departmental Communication and Collaboration

The Public Relations Team recently completed Town Council's strategic goal of developing a Media Relations Guide. This guide has been finished, is being presented to all departments, and plans for training are underway. Future projects include a town-wide graphic design standards manual by working with the Bergman Group, organizing media training, and assisting with plans for next years Statewide Neighborhood Conference to be held in Blacksburg.

Other

- The Community Relations Manager worked with ICMA and NRC on a Citizens Survey which will assist the Town in planning for the budget and CIP process, as well as our Performance Measurement initiatives. Results of the survey are on the web at http://www.blacksburg.gov/downloads/citizen_survey.pdf
- Worked with Meg Nugent, Graphic Designer on new logo for Blacksburg Recycling, plans for a new Blacksburg Transit logo, and a logo for the upcoming Flower and Garden Festival
- Hosted a number of tours for school children and international students
- Finalized Town's United Way Campaign and raised approximately \$6500 (our goal was \$5500)
- Continued working with local media on issues of priority, i.e. Lewis Named President of VML, Chandler Steps Down From Seat on Council, JB Jones Takes Chandler's Place in January, Mayor Named Honorary Member of Virginia AIA, Kent Square Project, Black House Move, Heritage Park Master Plan, First Responder/Blacksburg Alert System, Draper Road Traffic Study, Benefits of Rental Permitting Program, Solar Haus Accident, etc...
- Began working on fund raising for the Black House Restoration Project.
- Began working with Town Manager and staff to plan Blacksburg's first Citizens Leadership Institute

- Organized a successful Blacksburg Night at the Salem Avalanche

WTOB Channel 2 – Community Access Television

WTOB Channel 2 continued its commitment to providing the Blacksburg area with outstanding community and government oriented programming during this past year.

The most noticeable change viewers of WTOB have seen is the improvement in our production quality. This improvement is the result of our transition into a digital format. With the new equipment we have installed as part of our phased digital upgrade, we are able to have greater creative flexibility shooting and editing video, resulting in the use of higher quality visual effects; the creation of eye-catching graphics; and the development of multi-media productions. In addition, the picture quality that residents see has improved dramatically. Rather than a non-broadcast quality image, the image today is much more crisp, clean, and professional and compares with what can be seen on other cable channels.

This past fiscal year producers continued to develop programming that serves to educate and invigorate our community; Blacksburg Newslines, Kid Town USA, Senior Living, Live Blacksburg Town Council and Planning Commission meetings, and more.

Channel 2 also produced a number of specialty programs, assisted the Blacksburg Police Department with crime scene video surveillance enhancement, aired certain programs for the first time on DVD as opposed to VHS; began airing the Spanish language version of NASA's Destination Tomorrow; added to our field production equipment, and increased the weekday fall programming schedule.

WTOB also played an integral part in capturing a monumental event in Blacksburg's history. History on the Move: The Alexander Black House was a video documentary one-year in the making. Beginning in June 2002, Channel 2 recorded all events leading up to the day the Alexander Black House moved from Main Street to Draper Road. The 25-minute video documentary chronicled each step taken to preserve the historic home, including the day of the move. By July 2003, the video was ready for public viewing and the proceeds collected from video sales are being used as a fund raiser for the restoration of Alexander Black House.

WTOB Channel 2 project highlights include:

Community Service Video and Promotional Videos

United Way Campaign 2003 Video
Blacksburg Transit's 20th Anniversary
Blacksburg Rescue Squad (2 PSAs)

Government/Public Interest Productions

A Celebration of Accomplishments: 3rd Annual Neighborhood Mixer

Miller Southside Traffic Meetings
Town of Blacksburg Sanitary Sewer Options
Public Input on Sanitary Sewer Plan
Blacksburg Civic Beautification Awards
Blacksburg Transit Paratransit Public Hearing
History on the Move: The Alexander Black House
Virginia Municipal League Conference

Public Access Programs produced by WTOB Channel 2

Gods as Generals: Portraying the Civil War
Virginia Tech Civil War Weekend
League of Women Voters presents Air Quality: Why Our Concern?
League of Women Voters presents Illusions of Progress: The Search for Campaign Finance Reform
Blacksburg Sports Club
Blacksburg High School Football (Season of Coverage, partnership with WFNR radio.)

Blacksburg Newline Coverage

Emergency Response Drill at Montgomery Regional Hospital
Risk Watch Program
Kent Square Groundbreaking
Alexander Black House Move
Click2Gov
Blacksburg Transit's 20th Anniversary
Virginia Tech Home Football Games

Kid Town USA Themed Programs

Virginia Tech Athletic Department
A Trip to Transit
WUVT Radio
International Cultures
Contemporary Dance Ensemble

Senior Living Coverage

Prescription Drug advertising
BEV Seniors
Roanoke Hearing Clinic
Virginia Tech Falling Study
Senior Olympics
BT Access
Movin' Thru VA (Senior Walking program)

Other

Finalized Public Access Policy